

## NUGGETS of HISTORY

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### EVERY MAN HAS A STORY

By Hazel M. Hyde

When neighbors or friends speak of Albert Goranson, age 80, they almost always say, "He's a remarkable man." Then they begin to tell some friendly, helpful service he rendered to them. They eventually get around to speaking of his kindly wife, Esther Goranson, age 75, who is also an unusual woman. These two ambitious people decided recently to put an addition on a room of their house. They employed a builder and had the proper inspection. Then Al did all the wood paneling and the inside trim for the room. They made other changes such as adding a deep planter for artificial flowers and foliage which Al made and Esther arranged.

Al painted all the lower part of the outside of their house



and garage, located at 1510 Comanche Drive. Many cabinets, tables and sets of drawers in their home show evidence of Al's skill with his hands and tools. Hand made pillow covers, the draperies, and other items show Esther's handiwork. Two wall boards in the newly expanded room hold all of Esther's prize ribbons for cooking, baking, and flower growing. You can count 39 ribbons on flowers and sewing at Winnebago Farm Bureau Picnic and Trask Bridge Picnic or Ken Rock Garden Club. Then there are 32 ribbons on baking cakes cookies, and bread at these same places, as well as a ribbon for making a ribbon quilt.

When looking for someone to sit as a model for my first oil portrait, it became apparent that Al had the type of kindly, lively face that would provide a challenge. He sat regularly for two hours for three weeks and proudly hung the framed printing in the Goranson living room. Perhaps the idea for any interview was germinating then. We chatted about many things as the shape of his nose took form under the palate knife. Perhaps the likeness on the canvas was easier to achieve because of Al's lively sense of humor and continuing involvement in community activities. One day Al showed a wood carving of his head that another amateur had done.

Life has not been indulgent to Al Goranson. In the six years

he has been a neighbor, he received a broken back in a car injury at Mulford and East State, which would have stopped a less determined man. A fire of unknown origin burned down the garage and destroyed many of his treasured hand tools. He salvaged what he could and had a new garage built. Al made his own tool cabinet and bench, bought new equipment, and continued his hobby.

When neighbors need new shelves made, weather stripping renewed, or the bath tub recalked, Al lends a helping hand. When the church he attends, Shepherd of the Valley, needs some painting or paneling done, Al's personal schedule is altered so he can volunteer for the job.

But in an interview, September 9, 1970, Al Goranson told his amazing life story.

Lifting his head from his painting, Al said, "I wasn't adopted." And then a story of hardships met with spirit and discouragement met with courage unfolded. Occasionally the story was interrupted with a question. "Well," he continued, "my mother died when I was two weeks old. My father was very poor and had no way to care for me. At least six different people took me in before I was six months old. Each one neglected to feed me properly or keep me clean. Ugly bruises and sores covered my body and I was very scrawny. It looked like I might die when the Goransons took me. I think of them as my true parents and their children as brothers and sisters, although my own father lived to be 99 years and 10 months old, for they fed me and clothed me, until I was ten years old. My schooling stopped at that time, at third grade, and the Goransons could no longer keep me." Here Al fitted the dividers for records and paused to survey his work.

"Where was this?" I asked.

"Joliet, Illinois," he said and seemed to study about the past for a few minutes.

"How did you happen to come to Rockford?"

The story resumed then for Al had finished the task he had taken on, just because he liked us. He sat back on the floor, surrounded by his tool kit, the paint can, and some old newspapers. Al does these things for friends because he likes them, and he doesn't really charge for them. He will accept gifts. Al likes people and people like Al. He loves to work with his hands and has a great amount of skill.

(Continued in next issue)

#### THE THATCHER BLAKE TABLE

By Hazel M. Hyde

(Concluded from last issue)

At this point, the story might well conclude that Thatcher Blake farmed his claim, married, and later went into real estate and lived as an old man in Rockford.

The Rockford Historical Society has been engaged in trying to preserve the family histories, or genealogies, of early Rockford settlers. A genealogy committee has been set up to see whether this study shall extend to all persons who have lived in Rockford. Several persons have volunteered to try to help the historical society members (to the degree their time will permit) in gathering and arranging their family histories. The Rockford Library is constantly getting requests for help concerning families that once

lived in Winnebago County.

One of these letters seems to have a connection with the cherry-wood table that made the trip up Rock River. It seems to concern the Levi Moulthrop who became the second owner of the Thatcher Blake table.

The following letter was jotted down in a kind of abbreviated form and may not be quoted precisely:

Letterhead: City of Dearborn, Dearborn Historical Museum,  
Winfield H. Arneson, Chief Curator.

January 16, 1970

The Mayor of our city, Orville H. Hubbard, is interested in obtaining information:  
Gen. Henry Dearborn (1751-1829) and family  
Henry G. H. Dearborn and wife Sarah Harlem  
Major and Mrs. Thomas Melville

(Signature) Marion C. Forbes  
Archivist

Can anyone help with this request? At present this much information has been found by Mrs. Charles Andrews of the local history and genealogy room of the Rockford Public Library:

Marriage Records of Ogle and Winnebago Counties, Illinois;  
George, James m Olgee 1-3-1840

Mrs. Margaret Moulthrop married Ben Smith, Winnebago County 7-6-1840  
H.G.R. Dearborn m Sara Thurston, Winnebago County, 7-6-1840

There is a precious letter from a grandmother, Mrs. Ann George, to her grandson, Levi Moulthrop of Rockford, Illinois, in 1884. It follows:

COPY OF A LETTER WRITTEN BY MRS. ANN GEORGE  
Written for her grandson Levi Moulthrop of  
Rockford, Illinois, 1864

I think it is very important that every family should have a record of its ancestry, especially when a party of them emigrate to a new country as was the case with your Mother's parents.

I feel it is a duty although I can only give an indefinite account of what I know and what I have heard others say. I will give it truthfully as possible.

Your great grandfather was an Englishman named Sampson George. He with his wife Anne and family of six daughters and one son named Sampson, 9 years old, moved from the County of Cornwall, to Middleton Tyas, Yorkshire. The father was an agent for a company who had immense copper mines near the village. Later another company put in a claim to the mines, hence operations commenced for working them was abandoned and Mr. George directed his attention to other business. He was in comfortable circumstances and gave his son a good education, there being at that time an excellent grammar school about 2 miles from where they lived.

The father engaged as copying clerk with a lawyer named Hartley, who lived in Middleton Tyas. Mr. Hartley was a gay fox hun-

ting man and preferred pleasure to the dry study of law and in time, Mr. George became so useful to him with much business better suited to an older head. Mr. George was faithful, honest and dilligent and law was to him a pleasure and all his energies and faculties were concentrated in it. At one time, looking over some papers relative to a disputed title to some property which Mr. Hartley had to manage, he came across some old mouldy parchment documents which were connected with a law suit that had been laid over for want of evidence, had lain a great many years. Mr. George mentioned the circumstances to his employer, and he in astonishment, having forgotten to examine the chest, desired Mr. George to make further search and make an abstract in legal form, and if sufficient evidence can be found, I will take it into court and you shall be my agent and conduct the case from beginning to end and you shall be articted and when admitted, I shall take you into partnership.

The case was taken to the assizes at York, carried through and won by Mr. George. He became a partner. The firm name was Hartley & George.

He then married a young woman he had known from childhood, her name was Anne, I think Patterson, but am not sure of her sur name. They lived in good circumstances in Middleton Tyas. Mrs. George's father gave her a house and some land where they lived. They enlarged the house, improved the garden and pleasure grounds ornamented and made it a beautiful place.

They had seven children. Elizabeth remained single, Anne, married Mr. Twell a dry goods merchant in London. Francis married Mr. of Richmond, Yorkshire. Sampson, only son and younger child except Catherine, married Ann Swetnam, your Grandmother.

When Catherine was a baby the mother died. Having so many daughters, Mr. and Mrs. George thought best to hire a young governess in the house to attend to their education. She had been in the house about two years when Mrs. George died. Her name was Sarah Wright. She was the daughter of an opulent farmer near Drchester, Yorkshire. He afterwards married her. When the rumor of their intended marriage reached Mr. Hartley, he remonstrated with Mr. George on so imprudent a step as he was forty-five years old and the young lady was nineteen. Mr. George told him he intended to make her his wife. Mr. Hartley told him if he did he would dissolve partnership and withdraw his patronage. It was done and all his law business followed Mr. George, and Mr. Hartley had to retire from the practice of law, an acquisition of practice brought Mr. George an increased income.

Mrs. George, being a proud aspiring woman, they lived in higher style than in the days of the first wife, but notwithstanding, not any of the ladies of the surrounding neighborhood who visited with the first Mrs. George called upon her. She was the mother of 12 children, ten of whom were living when the father died in 1809. He left property to the amount of seventeen thousand pounds sterling and left seventeen children to bequeath it to, except three married daughters whom he had apportioned on their respective marriages.

He was law and land agent for the late Sir Ralph Millbank of Halmaby Hall about four miles from Middleton Tyas, and father of Lady Byxon. He used to take his own son Sampson, your grandfather, with him when he went to call on Sir Ralph and when they transacted business, the boy played with Miss Millbank. They were

about the same age. When Mr. George died, he left John Peneston Millbank, Esq., along with his widow, guardian of his younger children who were then under age.

After Sir Ralph Millbank's death, Sir John P. Millbank, Esq. his nephew, succeeded him to his titles and estates. They were entailed a short time after Mr. George's death. His son, your Grandfather, being under age, secured a position under the Government in the general P. O. in London. At his father's death, had he been old enough, he would have succeeded his father in his land agencies. He had studied with his father and was fitting himself for that office.

Mrs. George, the widow, went to the city of Durham to reside, that she might have better educational advantages for her children. Her income was considerable owing to some interest her late husband had in coal mines in the county of Durham. The proceeds before his death were small but a short time after, it increased so much that it brought her more money than her other income.

As to the property given to his first wife by her father, in a deed of gift he gave her the right to leave it to her son. Mr. George did not think it necessary to mention it in his will. He explained to his son his right to it as heir to his mother. After his death, his widow used her influence with some friends in London who procured for him his position in the P. O. to get him out of the way. The bond or deed of gift was destroyed and she sold the property for three hundred pounds, really worth more than three thousand pounds. The son then under age and in London did not know of the transaction. It was sold to a rich land owner who could fight an effort to reclaim it by the heir. They could prove nothing by the father's will and rather than spend all he had in litigation, he let it go.

Your Grandfather was an able politician. He brought to bear a calculation to redeem land tax by paying a sum down to the Government. It took years of study and labor but when completed, he sent it to Mr. Pitt, the Prime Minister to the King. It was put in the form of a bill and brought before both houses of Parliament. It passed and became a law. Mr. Pitt spoke in the house and commended the man who had rendered such a service to the country. He told them they might feel ashamed to know that an attorney in a village in a remote part of Yorkshire had done what they could not do. Mr. Pitt wrote Mr. George a letter of commendation and thanks in behalf of his Majesty's Servants for having done what they could not do and enclosed was a present of 600 pounds sterling.

Mr. George was also a religionist. He wrote and published a pamphlet on the Unity of the Deity and the Divinity of Christ. Two old friends of his, Dr. Zouch of Wyckliff Rectory and Dr. Swire of Melonsby, had copies printed for their friends.

Mr. George was a man of strict integrity. A gentlemen once having occasion to speak of him in the presence of his daughters (Mrs. Chadwick said) "I always consulted your late father if I had a doubtful case. I could depend on his judgment and his honesty, for", he added with a smile, "although a lawyer, he was an honest man."

He was a friend of the poor, always gave them advice for free. He would not take a case when the applicants for his aid were in the wrong. He would tell such to go and settle without an attorney. He was a deep thinker, and was known in the midst of dressing, to sit down in mental abstraction, become oblivious to all

around him. He allowed his wife a sum annually to pay all family expenses so he was free from that care.

Your grandfather was in London about eight years and had a lucrative position, but a pleasant one. He was Superintendent of the mail coach department. He enjoyed his work. His income was sufficient to enable him to move in the best society, also his late father's friends favored him. He was in ill health -- had frequent attacks of fever. His physician advised him to leave London and return to his former home town. He took board with a good practicable farmer. He was there three or four years studying farmers' methods.

He next went to Gales where my brother Solomon was conducting a malting and brewing business. A farm was attached to it. It was my Father's property. I lived with my Brother and your Grandfather. There we became acquainted and were married. A year later my brother sailed a second time to Demarara, South America. He became there a wealthy dry goods merchant. We took the business at Gales at a valuation, but your Grandfather being ignorant of the business, it proved to be a losing venture and after the loss of considerable capital, we gave it up and moved to Birmingham, lived there on our property two years, then moved to Erby Castle, and remained there five years.

WE THEN SAILED FOR AMERICA AND ARRIVED IN ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS, the last week in September 1836. The village consisted of three log cabins with bare ground for floors. We rented one and moved in.

Mr. George was fond of hunting and stories he had heard of the abundant game was his leading incentive to come to America. As soon as settled, he set out on a hunting trip, resting on damp ground took a hard cold, went home and developed lung fever and died five weeks from the day we arrived in Rockford.

Being left a widow in a strange country with five children, an eldest being 14 years old and the youngest 1 year, the outlook was dismal and the struggle to live was attained with much hardship and privation.

So far, I have given a brief account of the GEORGE FAMILY



THE THATCHER BLAKE TABLE



Thatcher Blake's home  
on South Main Street

and will now give some account of the SWETNAM AND NELSON FAMILIES though my knowledge of these is limited.

I have heard my father say he was descended from the Swetenhams of Swetenham Hall, Cheshire. One of the sons of that family was a profligate and conducted himself so badly that his father disinherited him. The son, in order to revenge, cut out some letters in his name and wrote the name SWETNAM. My Grandfather was a butcher, had a large family and was poor. JAMES, MY FATHER, when young went as waiting boy to Sir Richard Arkwright. After he left him he went to other gentlemen as valet, conducting himself so well that he won the good esteem of his employers. He saved about 400 pounds sterling. He came to visit an uncle named George Waisie of West Layton. His wife, Mrs. Waisie, was a distant relative of Mr. Thompson of Gales where he came to visit. There my Mother became acquainted with him. Her name was Margaret Nelson. She was a niece of Mrs. Lawson whose maiden name was Ann Nelson. Mr. and Mrs. Thompson adopted my Mother, having no children of their own. My Mother's Grandfather was an architect and Master builder. His son Robert succeeded him in business. My Mother's Mother was MARY SMITH. Her mother's name was Brown, niece of Admiral Brown who was buried at Stockton in the county of Durham. My Grandfather Nelson left six children. Robert, the oldest son went to sea. He was Captain and helped his Lordship when he received his death wound.

When my Father and my Mother were married, they lived for years with their Uncle and Aunt Thompson. My father commenced a brewing business on a small scale and bought malt by degrees. Through the assistance of Mr. Thompson he later bought land and built a house and carried on the business on a large scale. Shortly after, he bought a nice farm conveniently situated near his other business and thus he continued making money.

In after years I heard him say that my Mother was a good wife and brought him a large fortune. They had six children. James, the oldest, helped my Father in his business. Afterwards my Father retired and gave the business to my two oldest brothers, James and Robert. The latter had been in London and later in Liverpool, employed in a mercantile house. Now he came home to Join his brother at his Mother's request. Their profits were

immense but they were extravagant, and my oldest brother married a woman who would have beggared any man. The brothers dissolved partnership, Robert went to Demarara, South America and died soon after of yellow fever. George, the 4th son died in London, William the 5thson, died in Damarara. When Robert died, William made a vaulted grave to hold two bodies. One for Robert and one for himself. Both were soon occupied as William died shortly from yellow fever.

MY FATHER'S SIXTH CHILD WAS MYSELF, ANN. Our father died when I was in my fifth year, but we had a second mother in my Mother's Aunt Thompson. We were to her as grandchildren and she was to us the dearest earthly friend we had. I was named after her. She was 75 years old when she died and I was in my 14th year. My father married when I was in my 11th year. She was Esther Hardwick of Blakewell, my Father's housekeeper. This marriage was productive of unhappiness and I can truly say my Father's home never appeared like home to me afterwards.

They had three children, John, Mary (Mrs. Robinson) and Hannah (Mrs. Goodwin). Father went to Blakewell, Tybertshire where he died. His widow died there also. My Father left his nine Children sixteen hundred pounds sterling each and I am at present drawing money, a part of my share in my late stepmother's annuity, which came to me at her death. This fund \$400, I depend upon to furnish me with clothes and pocket money.

P. S. I have done the best I could to give you a detailed account of your ancestry, which on perusal I hope will convey a useful lesson. Honesty, integrity and punctuality are the marked traits of the heads of the two families. May you, my dear boy always bear this in mind and you will get through life with an unblemished character and a clear conscience.

Your Affectionate Grandmother  
ANN SWETNAM GEORGE

Rockford, Illinois  
October 6, 1864.

The interested reader is referred to the articles relevant to Thatcher Blake which have appeared in NUGGETS OF HISTORY. This man, who was one of the founders of our city of Rockford, would have been very surprised to have been told in 1834 that he was doing anything so momentous as founding a city:

Nov-Dec 1963 Vol 1: No 1 "Rootage of Rockford History"  
May-June 1964 Vol 1: No 4 "Dr. Bean Awards a Legacy of Blake's"  
July-Aug 1965 Vol II: No 5 "Thatcher Blake-Founder of Rockford"  
Nov-Dec 1968 Vol V: No 7 "Fast Growing Rockford"  
Jan-Feb 1969 Vol VI: No 2 "The Rock River and Rockford"  
May-June 1969 Vol VI: No 3 "Early Days in Winnebago County"  
Sept-Oct 1969 Vol VI: No 5 (continued; "Early Days in Winnebago Co")  
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